

Hazen Books
on Religion

THE BIBLE

By
Walter Russell Bowie

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THE BIBLE

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Great Men of the Bible
The Story of the Bible
The Master: A Life of Jesus
etc.



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TO
JEAN AND TED

"Two souls erect and strong
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire."



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CHAPTER I

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

THE Bible looks like a book, but it is more than a book. It is a library, made up of sixty-six different writings, long and short. The oldest of these date from approximately three thousand years ago, and the most recent from somewhere between 100 and 150 A. D. The first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, was written in Hebrew; the second part, the New Testament, in Greek. The Bible was thus associated originally with only two languages, and it was known only in narrow lands; but today the three great Bible societies of the United States and Great Britain print and circulate each year more than a million and a half complete Bibles and more than twenty-three million portions of the Bible, in over one thousand languages and dialects of peoples living in every country of the earth.

But why should this be? We live in a tense and crowded time. New issues press upon us and call for fresh decisions. What have we to do with a collection of ancient books? Why should we read the Bible?

Some people idly let that question answer itself. They assume that there is no reason at all why they should read it.

And they are right

if the present can be understood and lived effectively without perspective from the past.

if there is no curiosity about the influences that

have given our civilization its most characteristic marks.

if there is nothing uncomfortable in being ignorant of the inspiration that runs all through the great art and great literature of our western world.

In short, *if* tabloids and ticker tape and this week's *Time* will answer all the questions we are interested in asking, then there is no reason to read the Bible.

But suppose this is not true. Suppose there are deeper and wider ranges to what we want to know. Suppose we cannot be satisfied until we get a more adequate conception of what life is, and of what the great spirits of our race have believed about it, and of what the most shining visions are that men have put on canvas and fashioned into music and reflected in centuries of English poetry and prose. Suppose, in short, that we want to be educated in that which lies at the root of our intellectual, artistic, social, and religious heritage. Then we had better not let the Bible lie unread.

CHAPTER II

THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

THE Bible is great literature, and it is such in a twofold aspect: It deals with great themes, and it deals with them in a great way.

Its themes are God and man and life and death and destiny.

It does not deal with these abstractly. It does not talk in propositions and in syllogisms. It tells about people; so vividly, so penetratingly, that in their characters everlasting realities are revealed. In the Bible, as has been aptly said, truth is not argued out but acted out; and when we have watched these figures that fill the great stage of the Bible, we know not only what life was but what life is, and what the facts are which every man must deal with. Selfishness and unselfishness, mean ambitions and magnanimous loyalties, wild passions and difficult control, cruelty and gentleness, cowardice and courage—all these are in the Bible not as titles for academic essays, but as forces that live and move in people who startle us by their likeness to ourselves.

We hear much in modern literature of realism. But that is nothing new. The realism of the Bible is uncompromising. It does not gloss over the ugly depths of human viciousness and it does not smooth the portraits of its heroes. The writers of the books of the Bible had for the most part the artistry of men concerned only with the human truth. They tell of Cain, who murdered his

brother; of Noah, who reacted from a great deliverance by getting drunk; of Jacob, who carried out a fraud upon his old, blind father. They have done what Othello asked that his chronicler might do: "Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice." And when they portray the great souls, they do not extenuate their shortcomings either; and because the shadows are thus faithfully put in, the high lights of their characters are the more convincing.

Other books, however, beside the Bible have presented human figures vividly. Many biographers and novelists can do it today. But of the Bible this additional fact is pre-eminently true. It sets the human figures against an immense background. It keeps the least life from being trivial, because it relates the least life to the transcendent fact of God. It takes existence, which otherwise might be commonplace, and links it with eternal destiny. And so considered only as literature—to speak as yet of no more than that—it has a sweep and grandeur that not many other books ever written can approach.

Thus, as we noted in the first words of this chapter, the Bible is great literature because of the nobility of its theme. It tells of many men, and through their composite faces we see *man*—struggling, groping, sinning, and yet aspiring, lifting his eyes toward God, and at length (as we shall see) beholding God come amazingly more near to him than he had ever dared to dream.

But it is not only the subject-matter of the Bible that commands attention. Its craftsmanship also is astonishing.

Take first the Old Testament. Whose were the hands that first set down on tablet or parchment roll the words of the oldest books no person on earth can tell. But they were skilful hands. They could write in a way that many a great name in literature might wish to claim.

Look, for example, at their ability to tell a story. One of the most famous narratives of the Old Testament is that of Joseph—a story so colorful that children welcome it, and yet so rich in character that mature minds do not exhaust it. Thomas Mann has lately put forth his monumental series of volumes on Joseph—*Joseph and His Brothers*, *Joseph in Egypt*, etc. These books are wide-ranging in knowledge and full of beauty, but all of them rest on the old story that has come down to us from the book of Genesis. Open the Bible there at the 37th chapter, and we are launched upon a swift and vivid story of a boy who was different from his brothers because he had imagination. They said he was a dreamer, and they despised him. They grew so impatient of him that they sold him as a slave to a caravan of merchants going down to Egypt. From that point on the story widens and deepens till it reaches the astonishing conclusion of Joseph enthroned as viceroy of the Pharaoh in Egypt, where his brothers, completely ignorant of his identity, come down years afterwards in time of famine to sue to him for food. Merely to summarize the story is to spoil it; but there it lies in the book of Genesis for anyone who will to read, and it breathes with life and emotion that the passing of the centuries cannot dim.

The book of Judges is starred with dramatic stories—the story of Jael and Sisera, of Gideon, of Jephthah and

his tragic vow, of Samson and Delilah. In the book of Exodus there is the magnificent history of Moses, and in the books of Samuel and of Kings the stories of Samuel, of Saul, of Jonathan, and of David.

Or turn, for another example, to one of the shortest books of the Bible, the book of Ruth, and read the lovely story of this girl, married and widowed, who followed her husband's mother into an alien land, saying to her in the constancy of her unreckoning affection, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Then see her presently gleaning in the fields of Bethlehem, where Boaz, appointed by destiny to be her lover, comes.

Or again, thinking of the Bible still not in terms of its spiritual significance but simply in relation to its narrative power, read the book of Esther, and the book of Nehemiah. Esther is a strange book to have been included in the Bible, for the name of God is never mentioned in it; but it forms part of the background against which we understand better the passions of human life and the crude loyalties out of which loftier religion emerges. The book of Nehemiah is more definitely religious, though even here the religious consciousness falls short of the highest that the Old Testament expresses. But both of them are examples of that singular genius for swift narration that so many of those whose hands have touched the Bible somehow possessed. We watch the quick progress of events, and, in the concentrated light of a sentence or two, we see suddenly revealed the characters of those who make the events significant.

Esther the young queen, driven by compassion for her people who have treacherously been put in peril, goes in to plead with the suspicious oriental king to whom she has been married. She knows she may involve herself in the death of those she is about to plead for, but this is all that her quiet courage has to say: "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."¹ In equally few words also we see the essential character of Nehemiah. He is the leader in the attempt to rebuild the walls of destroyed Jerusalem, an attempt beset by enemies without and conspirators within. One of these latter comes to Nehemiah with a lying tale devised to make Nehemiah drop his task as hopeless and escape. But this man in the pride of his moral integrity disposes of his visitor with one scornful question: "Should such a man as I flee?"²

Thus far we have been dealing with some of the literary content of the Bible. That comes down to us of course from the original writers, writing in the Old Testament in Hebrew and in the New Testament in Greek. But we do not ordinarily read the Bible in the original languages. We read it in our English translation. Early in the sixteenth century William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale and others, in the face of political tyranny and ecclesiastical suspicion that cost Tyndale his life, put the whole Bible for the first time into the familiar English speech. Then in 1611, under the patronage of King James the First, a company of scholars whose

¹ The figures printed after quotations from the Bible refer to the summary on page 67, in which the sources of the quotations are listed, in so far as these have not been already indicated in the text.

ways of thought and speech reflected the great age of Elizabethan literature, produced what has since been known as the King James, or the Authorized, Version. There have been other translations since then, notably the English Revised and the American Revised of the late nineteenth century, and also individual translations of a more colloquial kind, such as those of Moffatt and of Goodspeed. They have values of their own, particularly in the greater exactness with which—by reason of access to earlier and better manuscripts discovered since 1611 and to the constant enrichment of biblical scholarship—they have rendered the meaning of passages in both Testaments that previously had been obscure. But it is still the King James Version that is usually read in public, and it is the King James Version that has had incomparable influence through the dignity and richness of its style.

Ordinarily a book loses greatly in translation, and loses the more in proportion to its degree of beauty. It is exceedingly rare that the turns of thought, the idioms, and the verbal rhythms of one language can be adequately reproduced in another. English is very different from Hebrew, and different also from Greek; and it would not be true to say that the full force of every passage in the Old Testament or the New is reflected in our English version. But it *is* true that by and large the great translations into our tongue have not only given the message of the Bible with extraordinary felicity, but have clothed it in a grandeur of expression that rises often to the level of literary genius.

In 1935 there was published a striking little book en-

titled *How to Enjoy the Bible*, by Anthony C. Deane,* the Vicar of All Saints, Ennismore Gardens, London.

"Notice," he writes, "how skillfully the translators chose their words from our rich twofold vocabulary. They prefer, for the most part, short words. They know the tranquil effect given by a flow of monosyllables:

"'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'—³ and in Ruth, that idyl of the harvest field, how exactly the wording of this sentence matches the setting, enhances its simple grace:

"'The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part me and thee'⁴—seventeen words, and only eighteen syllables. Try the effect of recasting that in longer words, and observe how its tender charm is marred! But no less well did those translators know how to employ sonorous Latinisms when a loftier diction was in better accord with the sense:

"'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible. . . .'⁵

"'This corruption shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. . . .'⁶

"'Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God.'⁷

"Or let us recall a passage in a quite different key:

"'How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings—'

[a flow of nimble, lightly-stressed words, so fitting the picture that we seem to watch the chickens scurrying to their shelter. And then a check, an instantaneous

* Hodder & Stoughton, London.

change; slow, reluctant monosyllables, ringing with vain regret]

*"and . . . ye . . . would . . . not!"*⁸

Or listen to the prayer which Samson gasps as he lays his arms round the great pillars he is to shake into overthrow—and you can hear the labouring of his breath:

"O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged on the Philistines. . . ." ⁹ Is not that a triumph of art?"

So the quality of the Bible as it comes to us is the combination of two influences that we cannot always distinguish, and that indeed do not need to be distinguished: on the one hand, what the Hebrew and Greek writers first set down, and on the other hand, the particular sound and color of our English forms. They blend into the resultant beauty of the Bible that we know.

This beauty of the Bible is evident in very different sorts of passages. Sometimes it is solemn and sonorous, sometimes lyrical; sometimes cast in very simple words, sometimes in words that roll like thunder, or beat like the waves of an ocean upon its shore.

Listen, for example, to the stately rhythm of the first words of the book of Genesis:

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."¹⁰

Listen to the impassioned declaration of the prophet Amos:

"Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?

"Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?

"Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

"The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"¹¹

.

"... ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.

"Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

"For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The God of hosts, is his name."¹²

Listen to the singing beauty of this promise from the prophecy of Isaiah:

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace;

that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

"Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. . . .

"The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."¹³

Or one may turn to other passages and find almost at random descriptions in which the extraordinary sensitiveness of the writers of the Bible for the beautiful and simple phrase is evident. For example, there is the description of Isaac waiting for the return of the servant who has gone into the east to bring his bride. Here in one verse is the description: "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming."¹⁴ Read that aloud, and listen to the almost magical loveliness of its syllables. In them is at once the strange brooding stillness of the evening, and through it the tinkling sound of the camels' bells. And observe the superb economy of words in such a sentence as this: "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."¹⁵ Or read the devastating parable with which the prophet Nathan confronted David the king, when David has been guilty of a grievous wrong that he was trying to brazen out. Nathan does not assail David with any direct reference to his own sin. He

begins in such a way that what might have been David's stubborn self-defence is off its guard, and his better moral conscience wide open to what Nathan seems to bring impersonally for him to judge. He will not condemn David; he will make David condemn himself. And four sentences are enough for him to tell the story that will do it.

Here are the one hundred and ninety-nine words that comprise the whole account of Nathan's mission, of what Nathan said, of what David felt and what David said, and of what happened then.

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

"The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

"But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

"And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

"And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

"And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man."¹⁶

Or for a still more lyrical beauty, turn to the psalms

and read: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."¹⁷ Or "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."¹⁸ "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"¹⁹

Thus far we have been turning to the Old Testament. Still more familiar is the beauty of the New.

Who would willingly lose from his childhood Christmas memories the idyllic loveliness of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, as it is written in the second chapter of the gospel of Luke, with its angelic chorus of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"; or the mystical story in the second chapter of Matthew of the coming of the Wise Men, who, "When they saw the star . . . rejoiced with exceeding great joy"? Those twenty verses of the gospel of Luke and those fifteen verses of the gospel of Matthew have been the inspiration for more great art both in paintings and in music than any other words ever written on this earth. It is true, as Phillips Brooks has put it in the most beautiful of the Christmas hymns:

"O little town of Bethlehem!
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight."

The parables of Jesus himself, as these have come down to us in the New Testament, are significant primarily of course for what they say, but we may well stop to note also the perfection of luminous simplicity with which they say it. Consider, for example, this picture of the love of God, introduced thus in the gospel narrative:

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

"And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

Then in four sentences he gives his answer:

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

"And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

"And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."²⁰

Or read in this same chapter the greatest of all the parables, too long to be quoted here, which begins, "A certain man had two sons:"

The Apostle Paul also, whose letters form a large part of the New Testament, knew how to put great thoughts into great expression that has not lost its grandeur when translated into our English tongue. Of such for example

is his rhapsody on love beginning "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal"; and ending, "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity";²¹ and of such also in the same letter is his outburst of faith in the resurrection, which rises to the climax "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."²²

Again and again also at other places in the New Testament one can find sentences that in sudden, gleaming beauty shine like stars:

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."²³

"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound."²⁴

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts."²⁵

"Let us not be weary in well-doing."²⁶

"Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."²⁷

"He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."²⁸

"He endured, as seeing him who is invisible."²⁹

"Love is of God . . . for God is love."³⁰

"They need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light."³¹

Such then is at least some suggestion of the Bible as literature. It is no wonder that its beauty of spirit and

beauty of word have been the root from which have sprung many flowerings.

To the inspiration of the Bible is due such great music as Mendelssohn's "Elijah," Handel's "Messiah," Stainer's "Crucifixion," and the chorales of Bach.

To this same inspiration we owe the incomparable loveliness of the Madonnas and the paintings of the birth in Bethlehem, and the Holy Family, and the visit of the Wise Men, with which Fra Angelico and Perugino and Raphael and others without number have filled the art galleries of the world.

And to this inspiration of the Bible we owe the influences in English prose and poetry so manifold that no brief catalogue could name them. *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, at the dawn of English literature, is steeped in the Bible. The mind of Shakespeare repeatedly reflects the Bible, sometimes with eloquent and explicit reference, as when in Henry IV he speaks of

"those holy fields

"Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet,

"Which fourteen hundred years ago were nail'd

"For our advantage on the bitter cross;"

and sometimes, as in Hamlet, in many brief allusions. George Herbert, John Donne, and the other metaphysical poets of seventeenth century England; John Milton, Robert Browning, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, William Blake; George Eliot, Dickens, Thackeray, Thomas Hardy—all these, even when they had in mind no consciously religious themes, could not have written as they did if they had not known the Bible. And among the

more recent writers, and in less expected quarters, the importance of the Bible for a right understanding of what they say—or of what they want *not* to say, but to deny—still is inescapable. Overtones from the Bible give their meaning to titles of such popular novels as *Eyeless in Gaza*, *My Son, My Son*, and *Grapes of Wrath*. And among the poets it is not only in Kipling's "Recessional" or John Masefield's "The Everlasting Mercy" that we hear the echoes of the Bible. We hear them in Vachel Lindsay, in Carl Sandburg, in T. S. Eliot, in Kenneth Patchen, in William Butler Yeats. Repeatedly in this modern literature, as in the literature already considered classic, there are allusions that will be missed entirely except by the reader who knows the Bible.

"Lo, with a little rod
"I did but touch the honey of romance—
"And must I lose a soul's inheritance?"

What does that figure mean unless one links it in association with the story of Jonathan as it appears in the Old Testament book of First Samuel in the fourteenth chapter, beginning at the twenty-fourth verse?

Carl Sandburg in his biography, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, tells how Lincoln said to Mrs. Rankin in New Salem "that before he had learned to read as a boy he had heard his mother saying over certain Bible verses day by day as she worked. He had learned those verses by heart: the tones of his mother's voice were in them." When he did learn to read, the Bible was one of the three or four books he had in his hands to read from: and any one who considers Lincoln's speeches, so terse,

so clear, so true to the great emotions, will hear in them the Bible's music and the Bible's mighty overtones of meaning.

Whoever wishes today to think nobly and to speak nobly may well turn to the spring from which Lincoln drank.

CHAPTER III

THE BIBLE AS THE BOOK OF LIFE

WE HAVE thought of the Bible as great literature, and have realized that its greatness is not only in the matter of form, but still more in its substance. It is great literature because it is the great book of life.

Nor does the Bible merely tell *about* life. It grows out of life in an extraordinarily direct and vivid way.

Let us consider now how the Bible came into being.

More than three thousand years ago certain tribes of Hebrews, a part of that greater racial division known as the Semitic peoples, had come into the country which was then called Canaan, but which we now know as Palestine. After a turbulent struggle, the echoes of which linger in the Bible in the book of Joshua, the Hebrews had won possession of most of the land. They were beginning to call themselves now by another and particular name—the people of Israel. The tradition from which that name grew is embodied in the story that appears in the thirty-second chapter of the book of Genesis. The patriarch Jacob, held by tradition to be the father of the twelve sons from whom the twelve Hebrew tribes took their names, one night in a crisis of his destiny found himself seized in the darkness by an unknown antagonist. Desperately Jacob wrestles with his supernatural adversary, and at the end that adversary says to Jacob this: “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob,

but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.”

The Israelites therefore—this people who call themselves by the proud name of a prince of God—believed that they were chosen for a great destiny. In the beginning there did not seem to be any very obvious signs of this. In Palestine some of the earlier inhabitants, the Canaanites, still maintained their foothold in scattered towns. Along the Mediterranean seaboard were the Philistines, and to the east were nomadic tribes of the desert who swept into Palestine on unpredictable and devastating forays. The Israelites had as yet no consistent unity. Leaders arose in one tribe or another as the outbreak of danger produced them, leaders of whom the book of Judges recounts the vivid and often violent traditions. But the temporary bonds that such leaders created usually fell apart when the danger was past.

But at the period of approximately 1000 B. C., a new force began. From the tribe of Benjamin there emerged a man of much ability. His name was Saul. The aged Samuel, a priest and religious seer, anointed Saul as king, and, though his kingdom was only the crude beginnings of anything like an ordered state, by his own courage and forcefulness Saul began to make his authority effective. Together with his brilliant and lovable son Jonathan, he waged what was for a time at least successful warfare against the Philistines. But Saul himself was destined to be overshadowed by a new figure that now emerged. A young shepherd named David came into Saul's army. Saul was greatly drawn to him, and the old Samuel marked him out as a man of destiny. When Saul

antagonized Samuel, Samuel anointed David to be king in his stead. This act seemed to have no immediate consequence, for Saul still held his kingship regardless of Samuel; but actually a train of events was set in motion that led to dramatic culminations. Saul became furiously jealous of David, and repeatedly tried to seize and kill him. David was driven into exile, though even so his affection for Saul and his devotion to Jonathan were never destroyed. When at length, in a disastrous battle with the Philistines at Mount Gilboa, Saul and Jonathan were slain, it was David who voiced the noble lament beginning thus:

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places:
how are the mighty fallen!

"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of
Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest
the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

"Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither
let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for
there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the
shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with
oil."

And the great dirge ends with this beautiful apostrophe to Jonathan:

"How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!
O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.

"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very
pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was
wonderful, passing the love of women.

"How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war
perished!"¹

After the death of Saul and Jonathan, David presently did become king, and gathered under his authority practically all the strength of the tribes of Israel. It was David who captured the hill fortress of Jerusalem and made this his capital. But it was to become much more than the capital of one small people. It was to become the focus of a religion that should give to the very name Jerusalem a spiritual significance unexcelled among the cities of this earth.

But we have yet to mark explicitly the relationship between the reign of David and the beginning of the writing of the Bible. That relationship was this. Probably in David's own lifetime, or almost immediately afterward, somebody wrote down the records of David's life and a group of stories about him. These are the oldest continuous narratives contained in that extraordinary library of books that we now call the Bible. They are vital and vivid to an almost incomparable degree, and there in the book of Samuel they wait for whoever will to read. Turn to that First Book of Samuel, beginning at the eighth chapter; and it is as though the curtain rose upon those scenes of ancient history made living and contemporary again. There we see the powerful but tragic figure of Saul, the gallant Jonathan, and David, whose brilliant destiny was to be so intertwined with theirs. We see not only what they did but how they felt toward one another and what motives moved them. Mark for example in the eighteenth chapter of this First Book of Samuel how the story throbs with life and passion.

"It came to pass when David had made an end of speak-

ing unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

“And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house.

“Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

“And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

“And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul’s servants.

“And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick.

“And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.

“And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?

“And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.”

The extraordinary thing about the man who wrote these records, which begin in the First Book of Samuel and continue into the second book of that name, is his capacity for objective truthfulness. The figures he is portraying are no bloodless idealizations. They are

breathing human beings, shown in all their quick reality, with their power and passion, their virtues and their faults. No one knows surely who this writer was. It may have been Abiathar, who was David's friend and priest. But, whoever it was, he wrote in a fashion so vivid and so compelling that not all the passage of years has dimmed what he described.

Thus in these records of Saul and Jonathan and David we find our earliest contemporary pages of the Bible. Other contemporary records were presently added to these. There were annals of the reign of Solomon, David's astute and able, though not always admirable son. And somewhere about the year 850 B. C. there were written down the superb stories of Elijah, the prophet out of the desert, which are included now in the First Book of the Kings.

We have marked that the Saul and David stories were the oldest contemporary narratives that have come down to us in the Bible. But this does not mean that they are the passages of the Bible that deal with the earliest times. What had happened in the generations before David? men began to ask. What had been the history of the Israelitish people? Above all, what had been their religious history? For the extraordinary thing that marked these people of Israel was that their supreme interest always lay here—in their sense of a relationship with the Unseen.

So sometime in the century following the death of David and at about the time of the career of the prophet Elijah, another writer, whose name has long since dis-

appeared (but whom the biblical commentators refer to as "J" because it was a characteristic of his Hebrew writing that he used the word Jehovah as the name of God), began to gather the ancient traditions that had come down by word of mouth through many generations. Some of these were songs and ballads, songs of war or other rhythmic utterances born at great moments of communal emotion, memorized and chanted. In the books of the Bible that were not written until after 1000 B. C., there is material that originated in periods far earlier than that. Of such, for example, is the song of Miriam, which is set within the framework of the book of Exodus: "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea;"² and the superb song of Deborah (incorporated now in the book of Judges), which begins, "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves," and ends with the passionate prayer in which the religious impulse and the human fierceness of a primitive society are blended: "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."³

But not all the ancient material consisted of songs. Some of it was made up of stories that clustered round great figures of history and of legend. All these the unknown writer of the ninth century B. C.—the writer to whom we owe the groundwork for the books that stand first in the Old Testament—wove into a continuous narrative, beginning with the naïve story of the Garden of Eden as it appears in the second chapter of the book of Genesis, continuing with the accounts of the patriarchs,

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Joseph in Egypt, of Moses and Joshua, of the march of the people of Israel under Moses' leadership through the desert into Canaan, and then the turbulent tale of what happened to the tribes as they sought to win a foothold in their new country. It is a narrative of men and of affairs, but most of all it is the story of a people in its relationship with God. This writer, like the other great spirits of his nation, believed that Israel had a divine destiny that it must struggle to fulfil. He saw men and judged men in the light of this supreme consideration. His ideas of God sometimes were primitive, as in his world and in his time they must in part have been; but his central conception was grand and true. He believed in a spiritual power to whom his nation was accountable, and his estimates of men's character in the sight of God were for the most part sound and sure.

The growth and interweaving of the historical books of the Old Testament was a gradual process, and the analysis of it into the different original strands, called by the commentators "J," "E," "D," and "P," would be too long and too intricate for so brief a book as this. It is set forth in fascinating detail in such a book as Bewer's *Literature of the Old Testament* and reflected in another way in Fosdick's *A Guide to the Understanding of the Bible*. Suffice it to say that sometime between 600 and 500 B. C. the process was nearly complete, and there had been gathered in Israel all that ancient history and tradition that is comprised now in the books of Genesis and Exodus, Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings. To these had been added also

elaborate records of the laws that had long been accepted and that were attributed to the great authority of Moses, from whom indeed some of the earliest of them had probably come. These laws, which have to do not only with the essentials of moral behavior and with religious loyalty, but also with provision for health and sanitation and minute community arrangements, may well be skipped by the general reader when, after the books of Genesis and Exodus, he comes to the long chapters containing them in the books of Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy. They represent the compilation that priests made for this people who, to an extraordinary degree, carried a religious conscience into all matters of the common life and the common day.

Thus far it may have seemed that the Old Testament was a very human book. So in one genuine and right sense it was. That is to say, its oldest continuous writings began with the simple human impulse of men to describe the life they had shared and the events in which they had participated. They looked at the vivid and immediate realities of men and things, described these as they had seen them, and then added to these the traditions that had come down to them of what the earlier generations had seen and known. Here then was history growing up out of instinctive roots, vital, unforced, unfeigned. But what did this history of human beings mean? What was its larger significance? That is what these men of Israel were always asking. And their answer was a religious answer. They said that the greatest moments in the lives of the greatest figures among the people

had been those in which they were conscious of coming into touch with One who was greater than themselves. A tradition of many generations said that the ancestor of the family that had grown to be the nation was Abraham, and of Abraham it was held that the reason why he came out of Ur of the Chaldees, where he had been born, into Canaan, which was ultimately to be the land of Israel, was because the voice of the living God had spoken in his heart:

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee:

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great."⁴

All the historical books of the Old Testament are written from the basis of this belief. The nation belonged to God, and God would guarantee the nation's greatness. There was religious earnestness and passion in that faith. But it was also a crude faith, and one that would have to go through a long process of development before it should reach ultimate purification.

That process of development leads through a succession of great and extraordinary figures. These were the prophets. The prophets of Israel are unique in the records of mankind. Other nations and races have had their great religious seers and leaders, but no other people has had a company of men who with such exalted moral and spiritual authority, and with such progressive truth, interpreted for a people the eternal meaning of its life. And the way they interpreted life was by interpreting God. Without the prophets, Israel might have wor-

shaped only a tribal deity, as indeed they did in the earlier centuries of their history, and as some nations that consider themselves modern and enlightened do today. The prophets lifted the thought of God to a universal majesty. They deepened and purified the conception of his will until men began to understand that what he sought was not ritual but righteousness. And at the climax of their understanding they saw that at the heart of God is not law alone but love.

Much of the Old Testament is made up of the message of the prophets. The earliest one of this great fellowship did not write anything, but in the First Book of Kings we hear the echo of his voice. Elijah the Tishbite confronts Ahab, king of Israel, with the challenge of a divine righteousness that the king thought he could ignore. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Ahab exclaimed in anger when Elijah appeared. And the prophet answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord."⁵ And on another occasion, when Ahab through an abominable piece of tyranny had seized the land of one of his subjects, Elijah confronted him at the gate. Ahab recoiled before him. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" he cried; and Elijah answered, "I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."⁶

The first of the prophets whose message is in writing is Amos, who began to preach about 750 B. C. The book of Amos, though it contains some doubtful and obscure chapters at the end, is usually so plain and so passionate that we who read it today both understand it and are

stirred by its undying fire. Here is a man who speaks without fear and without favor, undaunted by the rich and powerful, championing the poor. He brushed aside the soft confidence of those who imagined that Israel itself and Israel's civilization would have immunity from disaster because it was supposed to worship God. God's impartial justice would judge Israel as surely as it judged those nations thought outside the pale. "Thus saith the Lord," he cried; "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes."⁷ This intrepid prophet, though he had no official rank or commission, goes to the great temple of Bethel, which was a royal shrine, and Amaziah the priest tries contemptuously to dismiss him. "Prophesy no more at Bethel," he cries: "for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." But this is the answer he got from Amos: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman. . . . And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. Now therefore hear the word of the Lord!"⁸

After Amos, probably only a decade later, came Hosea, in some respects the most sensitive and tender of all the prophets, a man who out of a deep and tragic personal experience gained his insight into the compassion of God. His own wife had drifted into infidelity; and in the bitter realization of this, his impulse was to turn his back on her forever. But he did not do that, because his wounded but undying love would not let him let her go. Then through his own suffering he began to understand

what the sins of men must mean to the heart of God. If he himself could not help forgiving, how much more patiently must God forgive! So he could speak of God as crying:

"When Israel was a child, I loved him. . . . I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with the cords of a man, with bonds of love. . . . How shall I give thee up?"⁹

A generation after Amos and Hosea, there arose the great figure of Isaiah, a statesman of extraordinary vision, and a spokesman of moral truth to the whole country. The book of Isaiah, as we have it in the Old Testament, is a long one. The latter chapters of it were written not by the Isaiah who lived in the period that ended about 700 B. C., but a century or more later. Some of the other chapters in this long book also are doubtful as to their date, but much of it is the work of the great prophet whose name the whole book bears. To understand his message fully, one must take the trouble to study, in an introduction to the Old Testament or in a commentary on this particular book, the historical facts that surrounded him. But any reader who opens the book can understand the timeless moral vigor of its main passages and catch the spirit of the man who cried: "Wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."¹⁰

A younger contemporary of Isaiah was Micah, and it is from Micah that there comes that extraordinary sum-

mary in one sentence of the real meaning of religion: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"¹¹

A little more than a century after the time of Isaiah two other great prophets arose. By this time the whole national life of Israel had been shattered by the invasions of the Assyrian and Babylonian armies. Jerusalem was captured and sacked, and great numbers of people carried off into Babylon as exiles. Jeremiah still remained with the remnant in Jerusalem, and prophesied there. Ezekiel was one of those in the land of captivity, and his prophecy was given in Babylon. Jeremiah was the greater of the two, one of the greatest indeed of the inspired souls of all time. The heart of his message is in his belief that, notwithstanding all disaster and notwithstanding all the seeming collapse of religious assurance in the destruction of the Temple and other outward symbols, still the life of God can dwell in the hearts of men. "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."¹²

Other prophets belong to the record of the history of Israel, and the books of their prophecy form part of the Old Testament: Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Obadiah, Malachi, and Joel. To outline their several messages would be too long a matter for this very brief book. All of them are worth reading, and any one who goes into the public library of the city of Boston and looks at the magnificent frieze that Sargent

has painted there may catch imaginatively the range of tragedy and exaltation that these men swept.

Other books belong to the Old Testament and make up its rich completeness. There are the later historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which recount the adventure of rebuilding Jerusalem by men who returned after the exile in Babylon. There is the book of Esther, already referred to, which in the form of an historical romance written after the fall of Israel and after bitter years of exile and oppression, breathes the implacable spirit of nationalistic defiance; and there is, in bright contrast, the book of Ruth, a lovely pastoral idyll written by someone who believed that neither race nor nationality is an ultimate barrier to human sympathy and love. There is the Song of Solomon, a love poem strangely included just before the great book of Isaiah. There is the book of Jonah, which many persons, to their own great loss, have smiled at airily and ignored because they imagined it to be only a foolish story of a man swallowed alive by a fish. The book of Jonah does incorporate in its poetic narrative elements of vivid folk lore familiar to its original readers, but this is only incidental framework to its great purpose. It is the picture of a prophet who shared the fierce nationalistic exclusiveness that once all Israel felt, and it is the story of how God compelled this reluctant messenger to recognize that men of alien races belong within the circle of the divine compassion. There is the book of Daniel, an epic in the form of history, superbly expressing the faith of Israel in a time of dire persecution that no outward peril can overcome the man who has found his everlasting defence in God. There

is the book of Job, which wrestles with the eternal problem of the meaning of suffering; and there are the books of Proverbs, a collection of wise and thoughtful sayings; of Ecclesiastes, the shadowed philosophy of a worried cynic, set like a dark foil against the brighter pages of the Bible; and of the Psalms, a great collection of religious poetry.

Such, then, in brief suggestion is the Old Testament; but the Old Testament leads on to something greater. Its culmination and fulfilment is in the New.

The New Testament is much briefer than the Old, and its writings cover a shorter span of time. It centers round one supreme and overwhelming figure.

Recurrently among the Old Testament prophets there is the hope and expectation of one appointed by God to come some day as a deliverer and a savior. The Hebrew name for this expected one was Messiah. Some thought of him as a deliverer for Israel only, a national conqueror who should make the nation great. But the greater souls among the prophets thought of Messiah in a loftier way. He should come to bring somehow a new and better day for the world in general.

In the period when Augustus Caesar was emperor of Rome, a boy grew up in Nazareth, a little town of Galilee in the northern part of Palestine. As a young man and on until he was some thirty years of age, he worked as a carpenter there. But one day he left Nazareth and went out to preach. That day when he left Nazareth the world in general would have said that he was a person altogether inconsequential as compared with numberless

persons who might have been named in that contemporary Roman world; but as a matter of fact those supposedly great contemporaries are today as dead as dust, while he has become the center of the faith and hope of millions. His name was Jesus.

The New Testament, all of it, is about Jesus. It is partly a record of his sayings and the memory of his deeds. It is partly an attempt to explain him. It is partly a description of the influences that flowed from him through the life and work of the early Christian Church.

Jesus himself never wrote anything. That is to say, he wrote nothing on parchment or on paper. All the writing he did was on the lives of men. Our knowledge of him has come down first through oral tradition. The most vivid reflection of his speech is in his parables, those brief analogies or stories by which he put the great realities of religion into vivid, concrete form.

Here is one of them:

"And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

"And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

"And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

"But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

"And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

"And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

"And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

"And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

"And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

"Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?

"And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."¹³

Others of his parables may be read in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke: particularly in the thirteenth, eighteenth, twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew; the fourth and twelfth chapters of Mark; and the sixth, seventh, eighth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth,

eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth chapters of Luke.

The "Sermon on the Mount," which begins in the fifth chapter of the gospel of Matthew, is a collection of his teachings as these were remembered and handed down.

The active ministry of Jesus of preaching, teaching, and healing lasted at the utmost not more than three years, perhaps not more than one. But this was long enough for him to command loyalties and to arouse antagonisms that were incalculable. It was said that "the common people heard him gladly."¹⁴ They found in his sympathy, his understanding, and his compassion an inspiration to a hope and faith such as they had never known before. And out of the general crowd Jesus chose twelve men to be his intimate companions, to learn from him and ultimately to be witnesses for him. As they lived with him, they grew more and more impressed and awed by his greatness. One day their conviction about him blazed into expression. Jesus turned to them and asked, "Who do men say that I am?" (He was inquiring as to what the people at large were saying.) They answered: "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, One of the prophets." He asked: "Who do you say that I am?" Then Peter, the impulsive and vehement leader of the twelve, answered: "Thou art the Christ!"¹⁵

That was the utmost he could say. He meant that Jesus was more than a great teacher, more than a great prophet. He was the One whom many generations of Israel had longed for, the One whom the prophets had foretold—the supreme Deliverer appointed by God for

his people's salvation. "Thou art the Messiah!" was what he said. The Gospel, being written in Greek, used the Greek word *Christos*; and so through our English translation the Hebrew Messiah becomes for us the Christ.

But the high priests and the other holders of entrenched positions of power in the Jewish nation set themselves against Jesus for the very reason of the exalted estimate of him that people were beginning to hold. They were afraid that he might become the center of a popular enthusiasm that they could not check. So they contrived at last to bring charges of sedition against him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; and he, though sullenly and unwillingly, yielded to their pressure and handed Jesus over to be put to death. On the hill of Calvary, outside the walls of Jerusalem, he was nailed to a cross—the Roman mode of execution—between two robbers who happened at the same time to have been condemned. But even there he so bore himself that the gospels record one of the robbers as crying out, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom";¹⁶ and the Roman centurion as exclaiming, "Truly, this man was a son of God."¹⁷

The four first books of the New Testament—first, that is, in their printed order—are the so-called gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are the brief histories of Jesus, of his life, his work, his death, and of what came after his dying. The earliest of them, that of Mark, may have been written by approximately 70 A. D.; those of Luke and Matthew some decade or more later; that of John later still. But their material is much

earlier than their composition. At first there was thought to be no need of any written record. The memory and the impression of Jesus was so vivid and compelling that men did not have to read about him in a book. When later, however, it became important to write down something for the Christian fellowship, those who wrote the gospels drew upon material that in oral form had already begun to be definitely formulated in the Church's teaching, and that in part also had been expressed in various collections of written manuscripts that the authors of the gospels used.

The fifth book of the New Testament in its printed order, the so-called Acts of the Apostles, is a history of the early Christian Church in Jerusalem. That Church was based upon faith not only in One who had lived and died. The Church believed that Jesus, who had died, was still living. The climax of the gospels is in the thrilling story of the appearance to the disciples of Jesus alive again after he had been crucified. It was upon this confidence that the living Lord was with them, inspiring them, guiding them, strengthening them to heroic adventure, which made a little company of what otherwise would have been obscure men go out as they did into the Roman world to preach a gospel and to build a Church that have been spreading from that day to this.

Beginning with the sixth book of the New Testament, which is called the Epistle to the Romans, we come to the great contribution that was made by the most vivid and able of all the early followers of Jesus, Paul of Tarsus, who, after having been a bitter foe and persecutor of the early Christians, was himself converted, and became the

most tireless missionary of the message of Jesus Christ all round the countries of the Mediterranean. He himself founded little companies of Christians that grew into churches in some of the chief centers of the Roman world, in Thessalonica, in Philippi, in Corinth, in Ephesus, and in Rome itself; and the letters to the Thessalonians, to the Philippians, to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, perhaps the letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, and the letter to the Romans, are those that Paul sent after he had been to those cities and had gone farther in his journeyings through Asia Minor and Greece and finally to Rome. There is the beautiful brief personal letter of Paul to Philemon, and the letter to Titus and two letters to Timothy that bear Paul's name, but concerning which there is a difference of opinion as to how much of the text is directly his. They are great letters, sounding profound depths of religious meditation, reaching up to starry heights of spiritual power. They are the witness of a man who could say of himself, "Henceforth I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."¹⁸

The rest of the New Testament is made up of other letters the authorship of which is less certain, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, the Epistle of Jude, two that bear the name of Peter, three which bear the name of John. And then at the end comes the flaming book of Revelation. It belongs to the class of literature called apocalyptic, the kind of writing that had become familiar in the Jewish Church at the time just before the beginning of the Christian era—writings in which unknown authors expressed in passionate symbolism their faith in the triumph of their people and their people's

cause as against tyrannous oppression such as that of Rome. So in the book of Revelation some Christian of the first century voiced his assurance that the Christian Church, beginning then to be persecuted, would triumph over all the paganism that oppressed it.

Here again, as in the reading of the Old Testament, one can understand only as one is ready to read enough by way of commentary to be able to realize what needs called forth the particular books and what messages individually they meant to proclaim. But the one great meaning of the New Testament is clear. It is the attempt on the part of many men to express the immense significance of the Master in whom they had found the reality of God and the richness of life. And the end of it all is sufficiently expressed in the last words of the book of Revelation:

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

CHAPTER IV

WHAT THE BIBLE TELLS OF GOD AND MAN*

WE HAVE thought of the Bible as literature, and we have thought of it also as the supreme book of life; and we have marked that the reason why it is such is because it deals with the supreme themes of God and man and life and death and destiny.

All the reality of the Bible is built on that first word. The reason it can interpret man and the meaning of man's existence is because of that first word, God. Because it begins with the eternal fact of God, the Bible rests upon the everlasting faith that back of all the superficialities and the changes of this world there is Something and Someone by whom our life was created and is sustained, and in whose will is our peace.

It is true, of course, as we have seen, that the representation of God that the Bible gives is not always consistent. That makes the Bible all the more real and genuine, because it is the reflection of an experience and an awareness that were gradual and growing. In earlier and cruder times men saw as through a mist. Only at the climax of the Bible, in the light that gathers round the figure of Jesus, does the meaning of God grow altogether radiant.

Open the Bible at the book of Genesis and read the

* By courtesy of the American Bible Society, there are included here certain paragraphs from the author's chapter in *The Bible in Our Own Day*, published by the Oxford University Press.

account of the creation as this is told in the second chapter. There is another account of the creation in the first chapter; but that comes from a later date and a later hand. It is the story in the second chapter that represents a more primitive and childlike tradition. God is described as walking in the garden where he had put the man Adam, whom he had created out of the dust of the earth. He calls to Adam and to Eve his wife from amongst the trees "in the cool of the day." In the stories of the patriarchs, which are written in subsequent chapters of the book of Genesis, God is represented as drawing near in this same fashion. He talks to Abraham, and three angels who represent him come and stand in the door of Abraham's tent. In the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis there is an account of how Jacob heard the voice of God in his dream and believed that he had made a covenant with God upon the same terms of mutual advantage in which he might bargain with a man. With such naïveté of expression the early writers described the talk of God with human souls. But the important matter is not the expressions they used but the subject they believed in. They were telling about men who felt that they had a contact with the invisible, and the immortal value of these old pages from the Bible is best seen when we ask ourselves this question: Although we describe the experiences of religion differently from those early writers, do we know how to feel God as truly and as vividly as they felt him?

Or, to put the matter in another way, the greatness of the Bible, even in its earliest and most primitive elements, lies in its conception of a divine reality ruling the

universe, creating man, and inspiring man's slow and confused but onward-moving history. It makes but little difference that the oldest writers of the Bible were not scientists, and described, for example, the creation and the history that followed the creation not as a modern scientist would describe it, but as a poet would. The enduring significance of the Old Testament is like the significance of original maps as compared with the significance of maps that may be drawn today. Contrast, for example, the antique charts that Columbus used, or Amerigo Vespucci, or the Cabots, or Magellan. If we compare those charts with the actual facts of the islands and continents that they believed they were delineating, we shall see that they are full of inaccuracies and disproportions. In innumerable ways their details would have to be corrected and their lines redrawn. In precision and certainty they are far outstripped by the maps that one can buy in any bookstore now. But which maps have really been more significant in the history of the world: these later ones that embody all the fruit of our accumulated knowledge, or those earlier maps made when men were only groping for the truth? Obviously the earlier ones; for they have an immortal dignity which nothing that all the multitude of clerks and cartographers may put forth today can equal. Those early maps represent the immense and creative pioneering of the men who first blazed the pathways to new worlds. They may have been imperfect at numberless points, points that later would be corrected; but that did not essentially matter. They bear witness to the inspiration and the daring of voyagers who were great enough to discover and occupy

new continents for mankind. And that is exactly what the Old Testament represents. No matter how much modern scholarship may change or sharpen the outlines of its picture, it hands down to us the immortal record of exploring souls who carried forward great discoveries of God, and of great new widenesses of God that were waiting to be recorded.

All through the Bible, this sure sense of the reality of God is the scarlet thread that gives distinction to the growing pattern of its thought. Rapidly and plainly that thought expands. In the records that have to do with Moses, beginning in the second book of the Bible, the book of Exodus, we see already a conception of God that is grander and more majestic. God appears to Moses in the vision of a bush that burns with fire and is not consumed. When Moses asks God's name, he hears the answer, "I AM THAT I AM."¹ Moses leads the people of Israel out of their enslavement in Egypt, and at the volcanic mountain of Sinai he comes again into the presence of God, who is to be revealed to him, not visibly, but behind the thunderclouds and lightnings. Moses seems to see the sapphire pavement beneath his feet. He pleads to see the face of God; but it is written that God reveals to Moses that no man may look upon the splendor of his face and live. There was something infinite and unutterable about him before which the spirit of man must be in awe.

Even yet, however, God was thought of as the possession of one chosen people alone. The God of Israel was conceived as being concerned with Israel, and with no other nation, the leader of the armies of Israel against

their foes and his, ruling over the particular land on which his people lived, while the lands beyond belonged to other gods.

Into this thought of Jehovah, God of Israel, as the peculiar deity of his own people, there were to enter now two great influences to lift the thought of God to a grandeur that had not been reached before. In the first place, there was the growing conception that God must be a God of righteousness. Seen first from afar by those greater souls who stood like watchmen upon the heights of their own nobler experience to search the skies of the meaning of God, and, breaking like the light of dawn at length into the consciousness of all the people, came the new realization of this characteristic of God. He must be all that the best of men were, and more. Amos voiced this conviction when, amid the proud materialism of his day, commercial prosperity and wealth were growing rank in Israel; and when, to put the facts in modern language, men were complacently ready to give money to build fine churches, but had no scruple about being cruel and greedy when they went out of church to do business among their neighbors. "I hate, I despise your feast days," cried the prophet in the name of God, . . . "let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."² And Hosea, with words that Jesus himself was afterwards to quote, spoke God's purpose thus: "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."³ When at length these mighty voices of the prophets had made the soul of the nation listen, men could never think again in the mechanical terms of what had earlier constituted

relationship with God. Henceforth men knew that religion, if it was anything at all, was a matter not primarily of ritual, as previously, but of the right attitude of the heart in everyday human life.

Along with this ennoblement of men's sense of the nature of God, there was growing at the same time a conception that this true God of righteousness must be not local but universal. Huge historical happenings cleared the ground for this new understanding to grow. Beginning with the eighth century before Christ, there rolled in upon Israel the tremendous tidal waves of invasion from Assyria and Babylon. Over the eastern horizon the dark menace of their spearmen and their chariots rose like a flood and broke in ruin upon the land that had imagined itself secure. Nor was Israel alone in this disaster. Nation after nation went down before these ruthless conquerors from the East. All around there was the sound of the shattering of kingdoms and the overthrow of civilizations, until the earth seemed to tremble on the brink of doom. It was a time when men might well have lost faith, and little men did lose it. What was the worth of religion now? What had become of the protection of Israel's God? What did it mean that this people which had served him was about to be overthrown? To these questions the heroic moral consciousness of the prophets was ready with its answer. They towered above the little provincialisms of their people and looked out upon the world. They gazed beyond the confusion of the time into the quiet depth of God's eternal truth. And this was what they saw: There was no longer any such thing as isolation in the earth. All

men were involved in a common destiny. All men alike were subject to the impartial righteousness of God. Assyrians as well as men of Israel were the instruments of his hand. Israel had sinned, and Israel was falling. Other nations too would fall. At length conqueror and conquered alike would be weighed in the same balances. Where was their righteousness of spirit, soundness of civilization, cleanness of desire? With these a nation would survive. Without them, sooner or later, it would perish. Above the noise of men's panic, they spoke the truth which echoes in the great lines of the "Recessional":

"The tumult and the shouting dies;
The captains and the kings depart;
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart;
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget."

What more then was to be learned about God beyond that which the prophets had proclaimed?

One supreme revelation was left. God was righteous. That was a noble conception. God was universal. Grandeur was in the thought of that. But what of the hungry human heart? What of the particular man, with his wistful desires, with weaknesses that he could not overcome, with aspirations that he could not attain? How should he be helped by a God who seemed so vast and so far away?

Then came Jesus. He was no sentimentalist. He was never casual or complacent in the face of the dark facts

of human folly and sin. He could be very formidable in his reflection of the awful judgments of God; and he could speak of men whose offences were such that it had been better for them if a millstone had been hung around their necks and they had been cast into the depths of the sea. But the strength of Jesus was matched by his tenderness. To the honest-hearted, to the penitent, to the men and women who in spite of wretched failures *wanted* to do better, he turned with an infinitely understanding love. Through his eyes there shone the beauty of a final revelation. God ruled all nations; but he cared for them because all alike they were made up of human souls. God was law; but also, and more intimately, God was love. This had been hinted at and partially discovered by great souls in the Old Testament, but in Jesus it was fully revealed and by him fully declared. Now and forever God's purpose was not to condemn but to save. God's love, as the infinite soul of Jesus received it and passed it on to every lowliest man and woman, had come not to be ministered unto but to minister. It had come to call his children back to the house of the Father's fellowship.

“And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought.”

What the Bible has to say about *man* is always in relation to what we have already seen to be its overwhelming consciousness of God.

This leads to what seems at first like a contradiction

but is not a contradiction. On the one hand, the Bible is merciless in its revelation of the evils in human nature and in human life. On the other hand, no book exalts as does the Bible the moral and spiritual dignity of man. These two contrasting facts are reconciled in the remembrance of man's relationship to God. His evil is the shadow of his alienation when he turns away from God. His glory is the divine worth that is in him because ideally he belongs to God.

The Bible never blinks unpleasing facts. It is not afraid to call things by real names even when those names are short and hard. One of its straight, unflinching words is—"sin." Looking into the mirror of the Bible, men with uneasy consciences know that they have not merely made polite mistakes or wandered into some other accidental aberration that is to be perfumed by psychological terms, but that they have sinned. The Bible bears its unfailing witness that evil will not escape its punishment, and that the wages of sin is death. Cain the murderer goes out into the world branded by a mark which he will never erase, until his affrighted soul cries out in bitterness, "My punishment is greater than I can bear."⁴ The brothers of Joseph sell him as a slave into Egypt and laugh with cruel satisfaction at their envious triumph; but the time comes when they say one to another: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."⁵ Saul, the first king of Israel, destroys through evil choices his sense of a divine spirit, and lonely and morbid, he goes at last to the witch of Endor, saying, "I

am sore distressed; for . . . God is departed from me, and answereth me no more.”⁶ And at length on the disastrous battlefield of Mount Gilboa, with his army routed and his kingdom broken, he took his sword and fell upon it—in that tragic final act symbolizing his whole life, which year by year had been destroyed by his own perverted possibilities. Through the pages of the Old Testament, again and again there move the figures of the prophets, voicing the judgments of an eternal righteousness, calling men’s consciences to the bar of a judgment which not the mightiest of them could escape. “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil;” cries Isaiah—“that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! . . . as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust.”⁷ “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,”⁸ sang the Psalmist; but the voice of the fool is not the voice of that deep instinct of right and wrong that the Bible reveals in men. “God is not mocked,” that record says; “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”⁹ And in the eternal issue of right and wrong, the Bible from a hundred tongues sounds the solemn challenge that Deuteronomy ascribes to Moses, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, . . . therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”¹⁰

Here again the message of the Bible chimes in with our modern need. It is plain that the great world crisis through which we have been passing traces back to causes

that rest at bottom not on material conditions but on the character and conduct of men. There have been millions of hungry people, but this has not been because of any lack of existing food. There have been people shivering through the winters in unheated tenements, but this does not mean that there is not enough coal somewhere in the earth. There have been millions of people unemployed, but not for any lack of factories and foundries and machines at which to work. The breakdown rather has been in economic and human morale. A reckless competitive greed between classes within each country, and between the nations, has brought what ought to have been the wholesome business of the world into a deadlock. It is increasingly obvious that our world does literally have to choose between life and death, and the only way we can have life is through the cultivation in people of those steadier ideals of justice, mercy, and human sympathy that the Bible forever exalts.

If the Bible reveals in man first his imperfection, in the second place it reveals the fact of his divine discontent.

There is need in our time of this realization that the Bible wakes. We have been living in a period not only of deflated money but of deflated conceptions of man. Much of our modern literature is filled with the acids of cynicism and disillusionment. There is a general feeling abroad that human nature is a feeble and almost contemptible thing. Many people are afraid to confess their own ideals and afraid to believe in ideals in others.

Hypocrisy used to mean a man's effort to appear better than he is. The modern hypocrisy more often consists in pretending that he is worse, because he is afraid to show his real belief that there is such a thing as being good.

The Bible makes plain the magnificent truth that there is a hunger after righteousness. Also it does more. It shows that there is a satisfaction for that hunger.

The great figures of the Bible do not stand still. They may start from poor beginnings, but they do not end there. They may sin, but they are not satisfied with sinfulness. Even Jacob dreams his dream of the ladder set up from earth to heaven. Selfish and crafty as many of his instincts were, he too had within him a sense of his need of God if his life was to be complete. He began as the deceiver who crept off with his brother's birth-right; he ended as the man who, having learned deep lessons, wrestled with God and prevailed.

When we turn to the nobler characters of the Bible, we see them, at their poorest, sorry for their conscious wrong-doing; and at their best, filled with a scorn of mean and common things that lifted them by the power of a growing excellence. Read the Psalms and hear a penitent crying in the bitterness of his remorse, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."¹¹ Turn to the New Testament and listen to Peter saying, as with sudden awe he faced the great-

ness of Jesus, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."¹² Hear Paul laying bare his soul to the Christians of Rome, "I see another law in my members, . . . bringing me into captivity to the law of sin. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"¹³ So out of their sense of shortcoming and shame they cried. They could not rest in conscious evil. They might struggle in the valleys, but somewhere there was the path to the mountain top. They groped in darkness, but they lifted eyes that were wistful for the light.

And as men had this dissatisfaction with themselves, so also they refused to be content with the circumstances of an evil world. They willed to be something more than pawns in the grip of the forces of their generation. Elijah confronts the wickedness of the kingdom of Ahab. He is alone; one voice against the timid silence of the secret multitude who might have preferred goodness but did not dare. But Elijah withstands Ahab to his face. First of the great liberators of the common people, he champions the poor man against the mighty. And before Elijah was through, Ahab's throne was broken in pieces before the moral forces that the prophet had let loose. Amos likewise stands in the corrupt capital of Bethel and lifts up a new standard of conscience around which men might rally. These and other great figures of the Bible were no ineffective Hamlets crying, "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!" They stood, like Isaiah, before the double revelation of God's purity and the nation's evil, hearing the voice of God asking, "Whom shall I send?" and they answered, as

Isaiah did, "Here am I; send me."¹⁴ They stood, as Paul of Tarsus did in the moment of his vision and replied, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"¹⁵ They went out, as Paul afterwards went out, to dare the mighty venture of winning the world for the kingdom of God. They revealed that fire of heroic possibilities that slumbers in the heart of man until the breath of God blows it into prevailing flame. They made plain then what our own souls know now, that there is no satisfaction within us until we have seen and followed our highest and our best.

Thus the Bible treats sin and evil not as something to be lamented over, but as something to be changed. The Bible is the eternal tonic against cynicism and moral surrender. Its message is like the answer that a man once made to another man who was inveighing against religion. "Look at all the brutal, stupid things that make up life," the second man said; "I could have made a better world than this." And the first man replied: "That is what God put you here for; go and do it."

CHAPTER V

THE BIBLE AND OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD

WHAT, then, are some of the particular messages of the Bible for our own day?

In the first place, there is the Bible's great conception of God as active in history.

Men have not always or everywhere included that belief in their religion. Religion has often meant to them not the entrance of a Divine force into the process of human events, but the deliverance of their souls out of the earthly struggle to a mystical absorption into the Divine. Existence has seemed to them a weary cycle, as to which the only blessing would be escape. Or, if existence has been conceived as worthful, that worthfulness has often been attributed only to the past. The "golden age" lay far back in centuries forever lost, to be remembered with a weary longing but never to be regained.

The belief that animates the Bible is different from that, more robust and more dynamic. The Old Testament, from its naïve beginnings through the whole of that great expansion of religious understanding which we have seen to characterize it, is unvarying in this: namely, that it reflects a God who is operative in this actual world we human beings live in. The events of men and nations are not a meaningless whirl. They are the field on which an everlasting purpose is at work. In

the conviction of the Old Testament, it was God who called Abraham and made him the father of a nation destined to play its great religious rôle among the peoples of the earth. It was God who raised up Moses to deliver Israel out of Egypt. It was God who—as the centuries went on—determined the rise and fall of dynasties and the life or death of empires, and of whom it could be proclaimed: “Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.”¹

In the New Testament the hope that burns all through the Old Testament comes to a brighter flame. The prophets had believed at first that God would glorify the nation of Israel; then they believed that out of the nation, chastened for its sins and purified, there would come a saving remnant in whom the Divine purpose would be fulfilled. In the New Testament, the limits of a particular people are transcended. The gospel of Jesus was the gospel of “the Kingdom of God,” the proclamation, that is to say, of a new society in which human life should be brought to its great fulfilment. And he taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth.”

So long, therefore, as the Bible speaks, faith in purpose and in progress will continue. In spite of all dark interludes of seeming frustration and defeat, human history will still seem a heroic possibility that man can work out

with God. Where the flame of the Bible burns, neither cynicism nor defeatism can exist.

If thus, in the first place, the Bible brings to us today its conception of God as active in history, it brings also its consequent message of the accountability of men, and of all the life of man, to the ultimate authority of God.

That is a realization of immense importance for individuals and for nations also.

For individuals, first. The greatest danger to personal integrity is disbelief in any spiritual authority higher than the individual's own whim. In his *Ends and Means*,* Aldous Huxley is asking whether the world as a whole, and particularly the human beings in it and their works, have value and meaning. "This," he says, "is a question which, a few years ago, I should not even have posed. For, like so many of my contemporaries, I took it for granted that there was no meaning." Yes. But why did he take it for granted? Was it because any other conclusion would be built merely on sentimentality and self-deception? Did he disbelieve then in any great meaning simply because a brave, true spirit finds any other conclusion inevitable? Well, listen to Huxley himself:

"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption.

"Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don't

* Harper, New York.

know because we don't want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence. Those who detect no meaning in the world generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits their books that the world should be meaningless."

When men look up to nothing higher than themselves, their life inevitably begins to move on a mean, drab level. It is only when they look up to an authority and a purpose high enough and strong enough to hold them true that they can steer through the shifting winds of their own impulse towards some steady goal.

A realization of a spiritual authority to be found in God, and in nothing short of God, is needed also to keep the nations of this earth from moral tragedy. A good many individuals crave some sort of authority. They know that for society to be integrated at all it must have some cohesive force. But the terrible fact of our present world is that in many nations this instinct that seeks for an authority which will lift the individual above himself is being perverted into a false obedience. Instead of worshiping God, millions of people worship the fanaticism of blood or race or soil embodied in some führer or duce or in some other dictator idolatrously exalted into a tribal god.

Reinhold Niebuhr once began a lecture with this brilliant sentence: "Does the nation belong to God or to the devil? The answer can be given in one sentence. The nation belongs to God, but it is often in danger of becoming the devil by imagining that it is God." *There* is summed up the tragic contradiction within which so much that is noble and so much that is evil in the na-

tion's life may be included. In 1940, a German plane was shot down over England, and one of the pilots, a boy of twenty, taken dying to a hospital, begging faintly for something that those around him could not understand. At last someone made out what he wanted. It was a picture, any picture, of Hitler; and when one was brought to him out of a newspaper, he died contented, holding it in his hand. There was loyalty, trustful and splendid in its personal abandonment, but nevertheless inextricably tied to a vicious fact; for the boy's loyalty to an individual had become twisted unconsciously into loyalty to a perverted nationalism that, by making itself divine, had made itself the devil. Whenever any nationalism does make its own pride and power and advantage into the supreme end, denying any universal Authority by which it must be chastened and corrected, then that nationalism becomes a curse.

In the long run, as the superb witness of the Bible testifies, no idol can successfully exalt itself against God. That is to say, no temporary fanaticism, no matter how passionately it may be believed in and served, can escape the ultimate judgment of unshakable moral facts that are stronger than any nation and longer than any age. Whatever sets itself up against the everlasting standards of truth and honor and justice and mercy, writes its own doom. In the great words of the Bible, God is not mocked. Dreadful moral contradictions arise, and for long periods evil may seem to triumph. But sooner or later, the moral absolutes triumph. It is well that in this time, when many are bewildered and dismayed, we should turn again to the Bible and remember that.

In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* there is an extraordinary description of the meaning of the Battle of Waterloo.

"End of the dictatorship. A whole European system crumbled away."

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"Was it possible that Napoleon should have won that battle? We answer No. Why? Because of Wellington? Because of Blücher? No. Because of God.

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"The excessive weight of this man in human destiny disturbed the balance. . . . When the earth is suffering from too heavy a burden, there are mysterious groanings of the shades, to which the abyss lends an ear.

"Napoleon had been denounced in the infinite, and his fall had been decided on.

"He embarrassed God."

Change the name Napoleon, and the grand words of Victor Hugo are an echo of the truth that sounds all through the Bible from the time of the brutal conquerors from Assyria and Babylonia down to our own day. The shifting of the balance may not come so quickly as Victor Hugo pictured it; for with God "a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." But the truth remains, that any human power that affronts the moral order of the universe has started on the road to its own doom.

In the third place, the message of the Bible to our own day is a reaffirmation of the value of the individual.

Totalitarianism denies the worth of the individual.

It makes him a pawn in the huge process of power politics. "Believe, obey, fight," is the dogma of the Fascist power that was the first to be established. The individual is not to think for himself or act for himself. It is none of his business whether he is to live or die. He is to be a robot moving as the omnipotent and ruthless power of the state determines.

Now there is, of course, a great element of truth in the conception of the individual as linked with the larger whole. There cannot be any great society, nor can there be any development of noble personal life if individuals are mere unrelated anarchic atoms. A group loyalty is essential to the development of any large and generous inner life. But there are limits beyond which the control of society must not go if the springs of life are not to be destroyed. How then may this limit be established and maintained? How may the values of personality be safeguarded—those indispensable values of a man's ultimate freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience? No arguments of ordinary prudence will safeguard them. That has amply been demonstrated in the violent history of these recent years. No tradition, no custom, no abstract argument, will be sufficient. The only power that ultimately can safeguard the value of human personality against the barbarisms that have been emerging from the jungle is the kind of belief in man's relationship to God that the Bible represents. The divine right of kings is an exploded superstition; but there is a divine right of the common man, which is anchored in the unshakable convictions of that religion which the Old Testament and the New Testament proclaim.

Because a man is not merely a pawn in a nation's politics but a child of God and part of the universal human family, whose interests go beyond any nation's bounds, there is a final dignity in every soul that no dictatorship nor any other domineering usurpation can destroy.

Finally, the message of the Bible is of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament speaks hope and expectation. The New Testament speaks fulfilment. The prophets who were the highest flower of the Old Testament looked forward to One who should express in himself God's intimate meaning for human life. The faith of the New Testament is that this came true in Jesus.

The influence of Jesus is, by all human reckoning, an amazing fact. When he was crucified, it looked as though his enemies had disposed of him forever. But he was stronger than they dreamed. From him, as from some unprecedented spiritual radium, have emanated forces that are inexhaustible. Jesus is not merely a figure of the past. He enters as a living determinant into the character and life of men through unending generations. His spirit embodies itself in the Church that bears his name—though not only, and sometimes not even most conspicuously, in that. It is embodied in the wider company of those who may or may not have any ecclesiastical connection, but who at heart are Christians. No definition of the spirit of Jesus Christ can be exact or final, but there is something about that spirit so recognizable that people can always *feel* it when they come into its presence. It is strength, so sure of itself that it

can be gentle; it is self-command that can be self-forgetful; it is life that identifies itself with other lives in service that love inspires. Christian mothers in Christian homes have showed what a Christ-like spirit is. Men in the world's work who have found their happiness in what they could give rather than in what they could get have showed it. The influence of Christ both raises the standard a man accepts for himself, and also warms his heart with a new emotion, to help him measure up. Henry Sloane Coffin, returning from a visit to the Orient, wrote: "A keen-minded Chinese official, comparing the influence of Jesus with that of Confucius and Buddha and Lao-Tse, once said to me in Peking: 'He seems to have the power to create a more delicate conscience.' " And E. Stanley Jones, out of his long experience in India, has written: "In all the history of Christianity, whenever there has been a new emphasis upon Jesus, there has been a fresh outburst of vitality and virility."

Thus individuals are made different by that strange and inexhaustible power that comes from Jesus Christ. But it is not individuals only that he can affect. The life of society, and the life of the nations of the world, have a reckoning to make with him. It is growing increasingly plain that the fiercely segregated loyalties of class-conscious interests and fanatical nationalisms can destroy a world, but they cannot make one. The only thing that can make a new world order, fit to endure, is loyalty to the universal kingdom of God—the society of all human souls regarded as all of value because all are the children of God—which Jesus loved and died to create. In face of the world's stupidity and fury, its greed,

its blind collisions, its wars and cruel havoc, it often looks as though the ideals of Jesus were only a futile dream. Near one of the desolate fields where the bodies of young men killed in France in the World War of 1914-1918 were buried, there was—and is—an ancient cathedral on the façade of which there is a great stone crucifix. The figure of Christ hangs there in the representation of its perpetual agony, a symbol of the seeming fact that the real world still does and will reject him. It is true that the transformation of human nature and of human society to something greatly better than they are now may have a long and weary way to go. As James H. Breasted, great archaeologist, has pointed out: "Man became the first implement-making creature not later than the beginning of the Ice Age, probably a million years ago. At the same time, he became the first weapon-making creature. For perhaps a million years, therefore, he has been improving those weapons; but it is less than five thousand years since man began to feel the power of conscience to such a degree that it became a potent social force."*

But, however late or soon the emergence of mankind into a spiritual civilization may conceivably come true, this is plain: that the only influence which has the quality that could bring it about is the influence of Jesus. If there is a prevailing hope for human society, he is that hope. He in whom the whole message of the Bible culminates must teach the nations, if they are to be taught at all, how first to want and then to seek "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

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| 3. Hosea 6: 6 | 11. Psalm 51: 1-2, 10 |
| 4. Genesis 4: 13 | 12. Luke 5: 8 |
| 5. Genesis 42: 21 | 13. Romans 7: 24 |
| 6. I Samuel 28: 15 | 14. Isaiah 6: 8 |
| 7. Isaiah 5: 24 | 15. Acts 9: 6 |
| 8. Psalm 14: 1 | |

CHAPTER V

1. Isaiah 40: 28-29

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A FEW BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

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